181 that she is a girl, that one day she will be a man's plaything, an
831 object for his pleasure. The child would leave smiling and replace
her three fingers of rag even as she walked away. At dinner time a
[482] big girl would come carrying the gourd of tô, or sorghum gruel, on
her head, and on the palm of her right hand, at shoulder height, the
platter of dried fish sauce. She would be greeted from as far away
as she could be seen and asked for a report on her whole body, and
indeed there would be no stopping at "how are your feet" nor even at
"how are your breasts." And the girl would answer all these vile questions
without getting excited, and when a well-washed hand, ready to
be used as a spoon, embraced her or lifted her breasts, she was not
shocked; only the opposite would surprise her.

887 Here and there in the village a giant tree stretches its branches
538 afar, and the old men, lovers of endless palaver, enjoy themselves
● 521 under its shade. They go there from the early morning to weave cloth,
make mats, tan hides, scour goats' horns intended for powerful
amulets, etc., and often even /159/ just for the purpose of spending
the hours dozing. And in the midst of all these gray, or at least
graying, beards, swarms a world of children. Among the old men
there are good storytellers /conteur/, who excel in stories of hunting
and war that throb with interest -- but why, alas, must they always
graft on some salacious incident? Their mouths are full chiefly with
[831] stories of adultery and fornication. They will not spare you a single
detail, and they will readily go back to the very beginning so as to
lack no precision whatever. And the moral of these stories can be
reduced to this: "There is nothing in this world comparable to the
pleasures of the flesh; let us enjoy marriage and never pass up a chance
to obtain this satisfaction."

521 If the old men are this lewd, is it surprising to hear the young
831 men describe the ugliness of their bestial evenings while they make
864 mats, stretch the hides of drums, or sew a blouse, a cap, or trousers
for themselves in the b'lon, or entry hut? They talk constantly of their
soungourou, and this term, which should simply mean an unmarried
girl, means any woman, married or not, who gives herself to the
first comer.

Without any shame they talk and chat about all these vile acts
before their little brothers, before children ten and twelve years old,

521 831 864 and before little girls, and it is not unusual to see a big girl leaning against the door of the hut with ears wide open so as not to miss a word, and finding cause to burst into gales of laughter. Are all these people capable of being shocked? I doubt it, even as far as the young girls are concerned, for all or almost all of them have their favorite nooks in the bush. Moreover, they can tell each other vulgar stories, and one should hear them as they clean and spin cotton, or when in the evening, shut in a communal hut (1), they play, laugh, and

[591 882]

1. In the evening all young girls are shut in a communal hut or dormitory under the supervision of an old woman. The woman's duty is to prevent young men from coming in and to see that the girls do not go out and seek a boy friend's hospitality. There is a dormitory in each quarter.

chatter before going to sleep. Could it be otherwise? Since all the men have soungourou, they know that their fathers and brothers each have one, and they are not unaware that their mothers see no /160/ wrong in giving themselves to their men friends. The great crime is allowing oneself to be caught.

521 831 You may think I exaggerate, yet when two women, each with a nursing infant in her arms, are crouched in the court by their pots in which tô (gruel) is simmering, it is very unusual for them not to be gossiping about the marital infidelities of their neighbors and sometimes even their own. I am saying nothing about the old women with turned-up chins and toothless jaws; they are experienced midwives and talk mainly about abortions.

They are all the same, and more than one mother has made me blush as she gave the breast to her last born and smiled sweetly at the rest of the brood frolicking near her. In wishing health and prosperity to a child that a woman is nursing, one sometimes makes a mistake about its sex, and without respect for one's ears nor pity for

521 831 one's eyes, the answer is almost always: "A flé bani, mousoni do, ne na d'ima, ka ké i soungourou yé. But look here, this is a girl; I will give her to you, she will be your soungourou."

521 831 576 836 And all this carelessness from the moral standpoint should not surprise us in a country where a crowd of young men greet each other even in the presence of their mothers: "I sounna ko? About the affair of your sleep? And your lovemaking at night?" "I soungourou ka kendé? How is your soungourou?"

And where young girls do not blush to say to young men: "Do me the favor that I am asking you."

"Ne na ko doumani fo i ye.

I will tell you of a sweet affair (or: conversation, shameful embraces).

"Né na ne ko doumani d'i ma.

I will give you my sweet affair (or: I give myself to you).

In short, every Bambara who awards himself the prize of virtue, avoids saying that he has respected foreign women and girls temporarily under his roof. The statement would be received with a shrug of the shoulders and a smile. He merely says: "I have respected the women and girls of the village," and he does not shout this very loud nor before everybody.

2. Concerning Adultery and Fornication

684 Adultery is a crime in the eyes of every Negro, and the guilty one caught in the act is brought before the council of elders and severely punished. I must state, however, that although adultery seems a serious offence to all, the crime does not lie in the satisfaction obtained. There has been a lack of fairness, the rights of a third party have been violated, and in this lies all the wrongdoing.

Caught in the act, red handed, the guilty party makes a friendly deal with the husband, who rarely asks him for more than 16,000 cowrie shells (from 15 to 20 francs) and the material for a sacrifice to the family boli, comprising perhaps two hens, a goat, two kola nuts, and between 5 to 800 cowrie shells for the sacrificer's bonus.